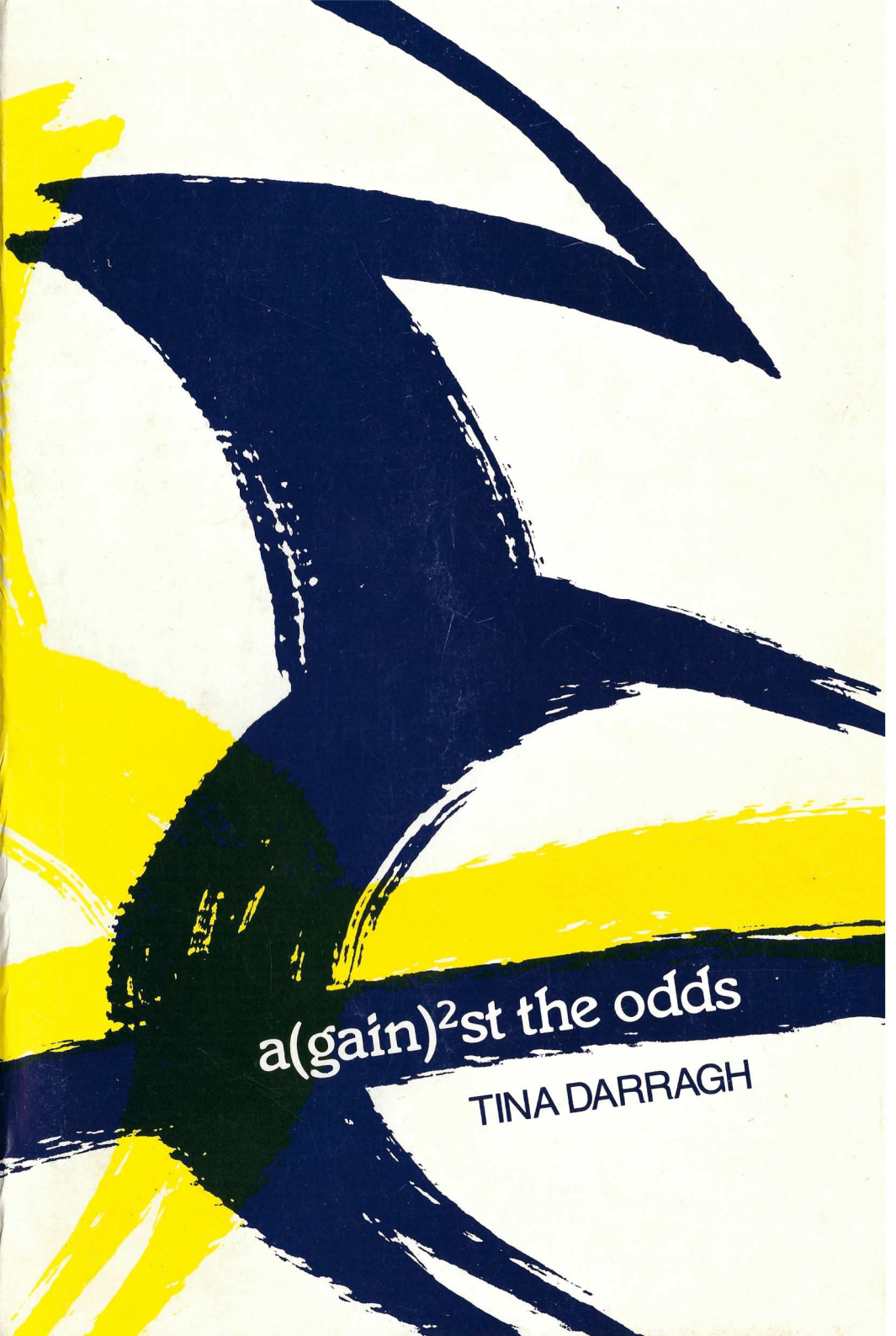




a(gain)²st the odds

TINA DARRAGH

a (gain)²st the odds

books by Tina Darragh:

my hands to myself, Dry Imager, 1975

Pi in the Skye, Ferguson and Franzino, 1980

on the corner to off the corner, Sun & Moon, 1981

Striking Resemblance, Burning Deck, 1989

a (gain)²st the odds

Tina Darragh

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Ariel, Big Allis, Jimmy's House of Knowledge, Poetics
Journal, and Washington Review of the Arts

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DEDICATION

The (gain) in the title refers to the second definition of "gain", a building tool. The construction of this manuscript owes much to its being read aloud over time, and I would like to dedicate it to those who have asked me to give readings again and again: Doug Lang of The Corcoran School of Art (Washington, DC), and Diane Ward, David Sternbach and Jessica Grim of the Ear Inn reading series (New York, New York).

Also, I would like to thank Michael Sappol for his comments and suggestions.

Finally, I am grateful to the staff at the Greenbelt, Maryland Public Library for their tolerance of my extensive use of the MacIntosh in the Computer Center.

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AUTHORS' PREFACE

"...After having insisted upon the exceptional importance & therefore the exceptional interest of the mutation we are living through, for after all we are living, conceiving the world, acting in the world & expressing the world according to the figures imposed by the geometry functioning since Euclid, in Euclid's space & this for some 23 centuries, so that events generally considered as of the first importance - Christ, Mohammed, the French Revolution, etc. - have all been understood (historically, intellectually, geometrically) in Euclid's space. As for the old rhetoric, what were its figures, of which we no longer even remember the names? Hyperbole, ellipse, etc. Now, it happens that these figures bear the same names as the figures of a certain geometry: Euclidian geometry. Our scientists have perceived that certain phenomena could not be explained in terms of [these figures]...couldn't be represented by them.

Francis Ponge, in an essay for a collection of Braque's work, 1971

"Lacan ... was trying 'to invent another geometry,' the 'geometry of the chain'...he became preoccupied with 'little loops of string' in an attempt to think about body and psyche at the same time.

"Lacan often has said that 'the unconscious is structured like a language.' Perhaps in some important ways it is structured like mathematics as well;"

"Lacan in America: Poetry and Science," Sherry Turkle,
Psychoanalytic Politics, pps. 246-7

"On the other hand, a scaling phenomenon is often spontaneously analyzed by the mind into a hierarchy ... Therefore, one must not hasten to follow Descartes' recommendation and begin to subdivide every difficulty into parts."

Benoit Mandelbrot, The Fractal Geometry of Nature, p. 262

"The history of the sequestering of controversial qualities, their banishment to the private, subjective realm and the emphasis on the measurement of quantities ... is so basic to our world-view and social order that it is very hard indeed to recover a critical perspective on it."

"Why are Figures so Significant?
The Role and the Critique of
Quantification," Robert M. Young,
Demystifying Social Statistics, p. 72

"long" increased simultaneously with "fine"

What is puzzling about the mathematician John Napier is his use of rectangles. He experimented with mirrors and lenses arranged in such a way that focused sunlight would be intense enough to kill people. Another of his experiments -- grouping numbers together to simplify multiplication -- led to his discovery of logarithms. Napier kept his logarithms on a boxed chart and built a set of numbered wooden rods -- called Napier's Bones -- to increase his multiplication rate. While he prided himself in building practical devices (such as an iron-clad cart with slots on the side for shooting enemies), it never occurred to him to make a slide rule.

patterns
love sep
in love
her 3.
4. of

Walking on the Line (excerpt of a Montessori lesson plan)

An ellipse is drawn on the floor in chalk to ensure that it's "straight" before putting down masking tape in that shape.

First presentation: Teacher walks on the line while the whole class watches. T then invites four or five children (young fours are best) to walk along with her. After awhile, T asks them to sit down and invites four or five others, continuing in this pattern until the whole class has had a turn.

Second presentation: On another day, T has the whole class walk on the line together, perhaps assigning lineoleum squares to each child in order to help them space themselves.

Third presentation: T shows Cs how to walk heel to toe.

Fourth presentation: T combines heel/toe walking with lineoleum square spacing.

Fifth presentation: T introduces walking to music with heel/toe movement.

walking the line

by putting one foot
in front of the other
I expect myself
to make each stop
a mirror allot

"Settle down, 'short fall'!"

ruling glance
within games of chance

though cumulative wins
over a period of time
look too wild to be believed

a cloud doesn't revolve around a cloud
mountains don't taper to rain
bark couldn't be called wrinkled
lightning won't be long alone

long & *let alone run*
with the exit
change condit
tives who wi
solely. 8. on
The baby let
[ME al one Al

arranged steps
pauses between soldiers
misnamed "space"
to suggest a source
along with a sum
as seen from above

but to trace a path
without calling time
ladder off shade and shine by
increasing "long" simultaneously with "fine":

sement windows.
a long chance
th a large amou
nses, and other long fine-grai
f more than ordinary or textur
net a. lasting a rela- Photog . f
"feet" fine ly
ed as elegantly;
s the
any *ME finel*
mes,
a in fine na
t in 1 1/2 in (2.
Eng- **fine nes**
ute fine 2

sputter plot

*for Lynne Dreyer
Joan Retallack
& Phyllis Rosenzweig*

love sep

sep 1. sepal 2. separate

indiv
calyx
equiv
ing) +
paled

vide, or
pair) to
vorce.
arate qu
oases.

sputter plot

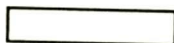
The time came when I couldn't walk in off the street & just "get a job" anymore. My "previous experience" seemed too sputtered, even for temporary agencies.

letter boxes

Jack was making what used to be known as a "first confession" but is now a group experience called the "Sacrament of Reconciliation." After a talk from the pulpit, the pastor went into the sanctuary followed in turn by each child who would sit beside him there and talk. Meanwhile, parents went to nearby confessionals where assistant pastors were waiting for them. I stood in line, went inside the box, knelt down and repeated the usual words up to "it has been 16 years"



"it has been 16 years"



"God"

"it has been 16 years"

my head

clouds to of no part
nate having no pat
as the nuclear mat

in dots

in a □, M's & W's look the same

"God" is a made-up name

the  move out



"unemployed" = ((no work this week) AND (have been looking for a month))

"total civilian workforce" = (paying job) OR ((no work) AND (looking for a month) AND NOT (institutionalized))

corporate unemployment = counting in quarters until you are out of quarters and then you're not a count.

my unemployment = ((no car) AND (no technical skills)) OR ((won't take Jack at local daycare) AND (no car)) OR ((can't work split shifts) AND (no daycare) OR (I fall asleep on graveyard shifts) OR ((preschool equal 3 hours) AND (part-time job equal 6 hours) AND (no local daycare) AND (no car))

late 1800's - with the specialization of labor, "unemployment" is seen as distinct from "idle," except during worker strikes.

"sputter" -> "special"

The course chosen to make "sputter" appear as "special" required six hours of research per week at a local library.

One day the binding of an acid book disintegrated over me as I reshelfed it. I tried to brush off the dust.

There were snickerings at a nearby "group study table."

ALL **i've been through i've been**

remains after one is taken simple
"other" □ used after □ *either* □
neither □ *whether* □ each
preceding one in turn the rest
in form **other** □ **another**

thing; something else
anything
else; *no* □ *(n) other*
nothing else

I turned the corner to look at each snicker in turn, concentrating:

scum scum scum

scum scum scum

residuum

late 1800s: mid-level management privilege based, not in ownership, but in possession of knowledge which, to count as land, has to appear unique, complete and inherited.

When management can't produce the profits they promise, their reports refer to the "residuum - those not fit for employment - the remainder" as the reason expectations are not met.

a prediction

1883 The term "eugenics" is first used by Darwin's cousin Francis Galton, who believed that good measurement was the key to good management:

"Various topics more or less connected with that of the cultivation of race, or as we might call it, with "eugenic" questions."

1885 Galton introduces the calculation "regression".

regression estimating the value of one thing by its relationship to another

each time a dot, then corresponding dots connected

a line drawn along where there is the least distance between the pairs so this line "of best fit" can be viewed alongside another line that's of "no use at all"

comparison	of measurements that share the same steps
1888	Galton's associate Karl Pearson begins to substitute descriptions for interval measurements when relating data. Adjectives are portrayed as cut-off points on an underlying, continuous scale thought by some to be "evolutionary".
1911	A list of descriptions indicating potential social deviance, developed by the Italian anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, is first published in this country. Left-handedness, seizures, and any other type of "hyperexcitability" head up the list.

- 1933 The first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists 72 adjectives formed with the prefix "hyper".
- 1972 *The Village Voice* publishes an article concerning the number of children given psychotropic drugs for "hyperactivity".
- 1987 5.9 % of Baltimore County's 35,504 elementary school students are given psychotropic drugs for hyperactivity.
- 1989 The second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists 199 adjectives formed with the prefix "hyper".

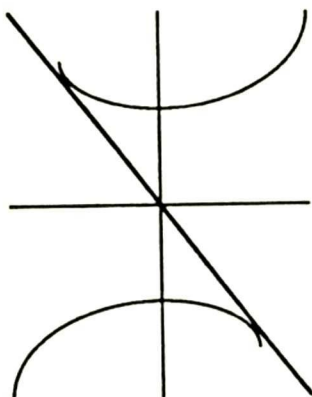
footnote at "figure of speech"

the hyperbola

a throwing beyond measure

the hyperbole

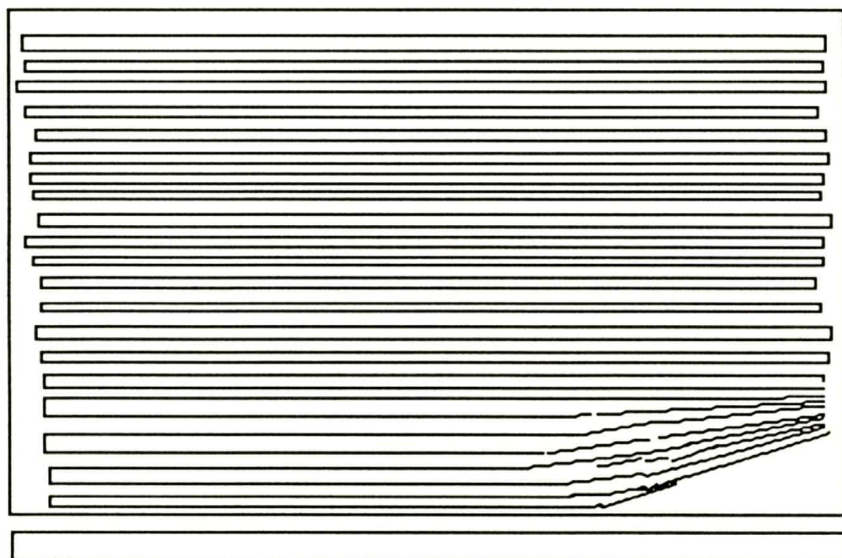
exaggeration



a throwing out at \ of (com)pare
(dis)pair

payre: a metrical tag, mea
s right
t doubt, without fail
der).
an alteration of '
e right an
er use.
air of glov
i, Whiche
tirrups, fel
any di
mewhat *hum*
selves

When the kitchen blind is down, it bunches up on the right where the bananas ripen on the sill. The only thing I do before making coffee in the morning is open this blind. One morning, I notice that the next window over has a corresponding bunch-up in the blind.



This morning, I used the last banana. When I returned from work, the neighbor's blind was down. After shopping, I put a new bunch on the sill. The bunch-up returns to the neighbor's blind. This bunch-up/bunch-down next door continues for a couple of weeks and then stops.

lattice at \ of (com)pare
(dis)pair

r'), *n.* 1. lo
something that
his mother. -
thout hope (often fol. by
ons. -*v.t.* 4. *Obs.* to give up
compare (*n.*) *despeiren* (*v.*) < A
display th tonic s. of *desperer*
verb). - *vape*, equiv. to *de-*
equal: *Dekk*] - **de spair'**
pear's. 5. *tgloom*, dis
*inly compo*DENCY
uality

This morning I raise the blind and see the bunch-up, but I have no bananas. The best I can do is a roll of paper towel. Even before I leave for work, the bunch-up is gone. That night I buy some large, green bananas. The bunch-up returns two days later, for a day.

lattice at "split"

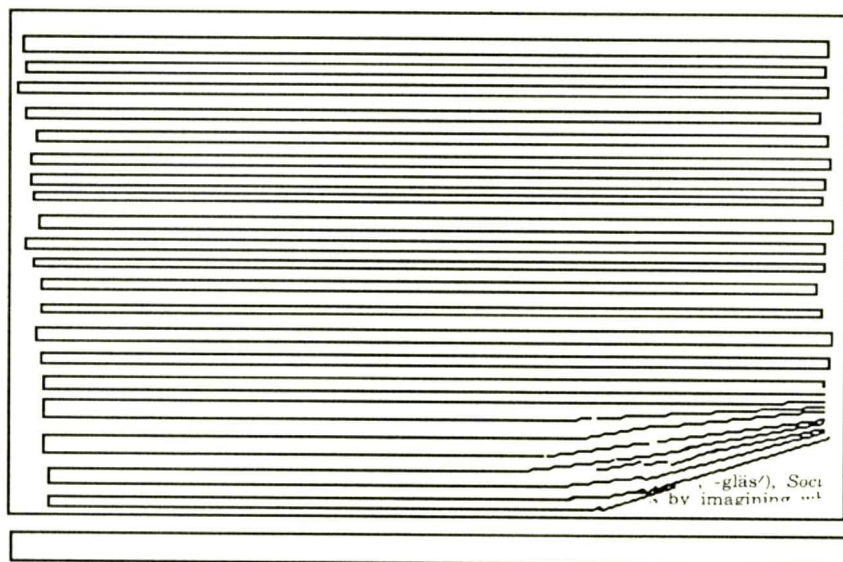
they are often
and *to just have*).

Designating a style o
joining rooms are separate

teria in which an individua
istinct identities.
ise from a log,

instant: a flash
cast

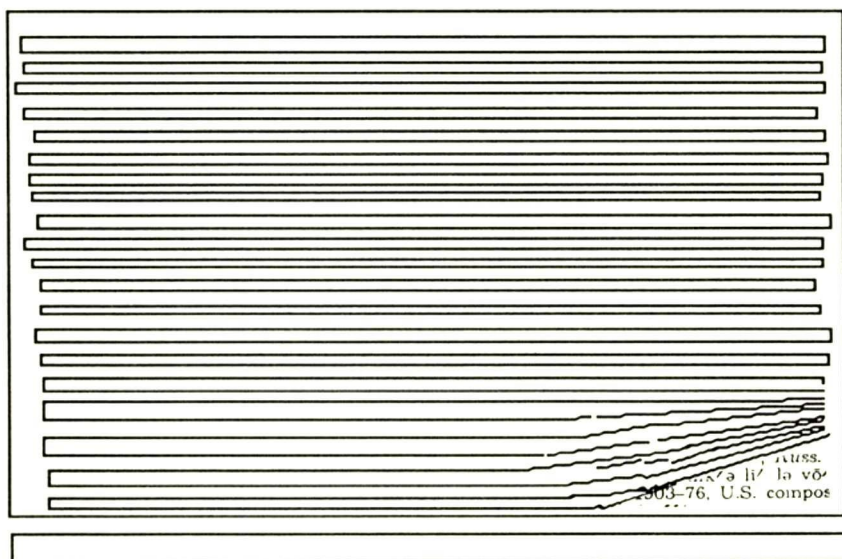
Tonight, there is a bunch-up and I can see words there. They seem to be from some sort of poster, in bold print with shadows. I can't make out the words.



for klas'mør
am. {LOWER¹ + C1

[Redacted text block containing multiple lines of horizontal bars and some visible text at the bottom right: "olds fo", "EGIANCE af", "to his or her countr"]

[Redacted text block containing a single line of horizontal bars]



After the neighbor is inadvertently locked out of his apartment, we agree to keep a set of each other's keys. I expect the blind to bunch-up immediately after the exchange, but it doesn't.

One night, I know that the coast will be clear
long enough for me to go to the words next door.
They turn out to be not from a poster, but from
the last of a dozen cover girls lined up along the
wall. There's not enough room for Miss 12, who
is scrunched down toward the window. Titles
outline her arm where it's outstretched, hand on
hip. I don't even read the words.

Usually a step sharpens the center, but in this case the step moves around, first seeming to be close to one thing, then even closer to another, closer to a third still, without settling down. No cut-off imposed on the square or circle or ellipse or rhombus or triangle after the step. No figuring the walk.

Now through the occasional bunch-up, shadows
from the line leading up to the blind appear as
dots, all of us

What good is a flat horizon?

A flat horizon does not depend on where I am.

as relief,
separate "I stand" s
wo/ruffle
occur amid
nothing sensible

less longing for
immediate equidistance

feeling a cut-off
as chaotic

three manifestos

.....

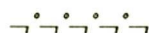
The Best of Intentions
Error Message
Don't Face Off the Fractals
(Revisited)

THE BEST OF INTENTIONS

Washington Review of the Arts,
Aug-Sept, 1983

Manifesto:	given	public domain
Contents:	intentions	a stretching agent
	opinions	think + to put
	objectives	toward + throw/or/ against + throw/or/ inversely + throw
	motives	serving to move

"Content" is constructed as an action word; the direction it takes is a variable. The subtleties of "content", then, are not exact meanings to be used properly in a sentence, but the ebb and flow of the stretching and the throwing.



Here, the use of "variable" can be unnerving. When I remove the aspect of "fixed point" from our notion of the definition of a word, am I removing as well the reader's ability to focus on the work in a relaxed way? If I challenge the concept of etymology as a linear progression and claim instead the right for words to act as open forms, moving in and out of their historical contexts, am I disrupting the reader's sense of order to such an extent that she/he is unable to reflect on her life without needing an "other" to tie things together? In my attempts to think of words on their own terms, have I created a fascistic form?

While following this line of questioning, I am consoled by the existence of the random function as an ordering principle. We think of "random" as "helker-skelter", but as a programming concept it is used to define parameters within which the direction of diversity is productive.

↵
.
↵

RANDOMIZE, as an instruction, develops graphs and charts - general shapes created by the plotting of specific points - using a formula that produces numbers between 0 and 1, generating a new number from the previous one. It's a matter of becoming accustomed to this new mode of organization.

L↵L↵L↵

If poetry can be thought of as having a role to play in our culture, one aspect of the job would be to make this random function - as a process, as an organizing agent - visible, tactile, part of our sense of the world. We know we can do it.



Long after sculptor Tony Smith took a trip down the unfinished NJ Turnpike and experienced the pleasure of undefined presences all around, the scientists at Bell Labs discovered that the mind does not need contours to synthesize data. We can relax with randomness and know that depth is something we organize, without the need for a Big Picture, without the need to tie it all together.

ERROR MESSAGE

Poetics Journal, No. 5, May, 1985

I need a narrative structure to be part of my writing, but I have to identify that need as "embarrassing" (i.e.: "something wrong", an "error condition") to even begin discussing it. Picking a point in history helps start me out; in this instance, 1974 - there had been no Revolution, let alone any ongoing restructuring of the nuclear family. I realized that I was going to be living my life within political and social structures slated to be as conservative (if not more so) than the ones I'd grown up with, and I found myself turning to words and the directions they suggested to me.

Naturally, I felt that I was the only one going that way, but gradually I began reading the work of others who seemed to be moving along the same lines. Given this sense of a "hidden" community of workers such as myself, I replaced "the story of the Revolution" with "the story of turning to words". This is not quite the same as saying that my writing became a substitute for political action, or that it is something I'll do in between periods of political activism. Rather, I think

that I format my writing to go in and out of narrative to coincide with the way I respond to any worlded activity - that is, I follow a prescribed set of rules that produces a sense of "numbness" which in turn redefines the prescription, and so on.

I use the word "numbness" instead of "alienation" because there is the sense of "other" and "turning away from" in "alienation" that I don't want to include here. "Numbness" corresponds more to "blank", the _____ that many of us have used in our writing. I've always liked the "blank" because it suggests that the inarticulate void is not a mass of random particles per se, but some sort of structure of them - a hidden narrative. This question comes to mind: how do the hidden narratives inform the conscious ones that we work to do or undo? It's not really a matter of filling in the "blank", for that would be merely an extension of the conscious narrative instead of a redefinition. My guess is that the blank operates one one - a gap, an error, a defective measure, if you will, of the conscious narrative at hand. The mistake illuminates.

What does this then cause? Ultimately, I think that the blank throws open the nature of cause itself, and the relationship of cause and effect. For if language isn't experienced as both an active and a defective process, then one is (by default) either passively the defective cause of what is wrong or passively the defective effect. Either way, the possibility for worlded activity is severely limited, and hopelessness literally can "hold" sway.

I wouldn't like to predict the number of forms that "error messages" could take, but the notion of a "measuring blank" is one that continues to prompt me and makes me want to prompt back.

DON'T FACE OFF THE FRACTALS (REVISITED)

*(Originally delivered at the Canessa Park
Reading and Talk series, San Francisco,
CA, 12/2/84; revisited August, 1989)*

Godard's *Alphaville*. Computers move in circles generating loss of individuality. The hero counters by going "straight ahead toward everything one loves." The last words:

Lemmy: "You've got to manage by yourself, and only then will you be saved."

Natasha: "I love you."

.....

Doug Lang on Vietnam War movies: the emotional component is not horror at the inhumanity of war, but disgust at yet another example of Watergate-era inept management.

.....

Marketing of "personal" computers begins in 1975.

"...software [w/icons] capitalizes on the user illusion...by acting as an "agent": an active extension of one's purpose and goals."

Alan Kay, *Scientific American*, 9/84

.....

"User interface" now "user illusion" - going from active to passive role with the addition of "mediating" design devices that "intercede" with the machine on the user's behalf (in much the same medieval way as the Blessed Mother is said to go to the Father when you know not what to do.) Marketing of "you must have a machine to think," then "you think better with a machine."

Imposition of hierarchical structures to reinforce user passivity - two examples:

Decision support systems assign a hierarchical tree structure (calling the first level nodes "parent nodes" and subsequent nodes "child nodes") to a basic exercise in probability theory. The user chooses values between 0 and 1 for certain conditions affecting a specific goal; if the combined value for the set adds up to more than 1, the user receives a message that the choices are inconsistent.

Nutritionists, accustomed to structuring a diet to conform to the RDAs, were uncomfortable with the "create a standard" feature of a nutrition

program that enabled them to assign an individual a "degree of risk" in terms of dietary choices. They asked for a "line" (hierarchy of choices) to be drawn on the screen so they could utilize that option of the software.

Central issue: when the hierarchical structures and icons create an illusion of righteous "self-management" with pcs, issues of real personal freedom can be ignored. For example, 85% of the Fortune 500 companies surveyed in a followup to the 1977 Privacy Protection Study Commission reported having no policy protecting financial, medical, insurance, education and employment records. (*The Washington Post*, 4/21/89, p. A26)

Perhaps this trend toward passivity can be countered to some extent by the continued development of fractal geometry programs, returning the notion of "working tool" to the computer along with the formulas for open-ended measurement that are true problem-solving techniques in the world.

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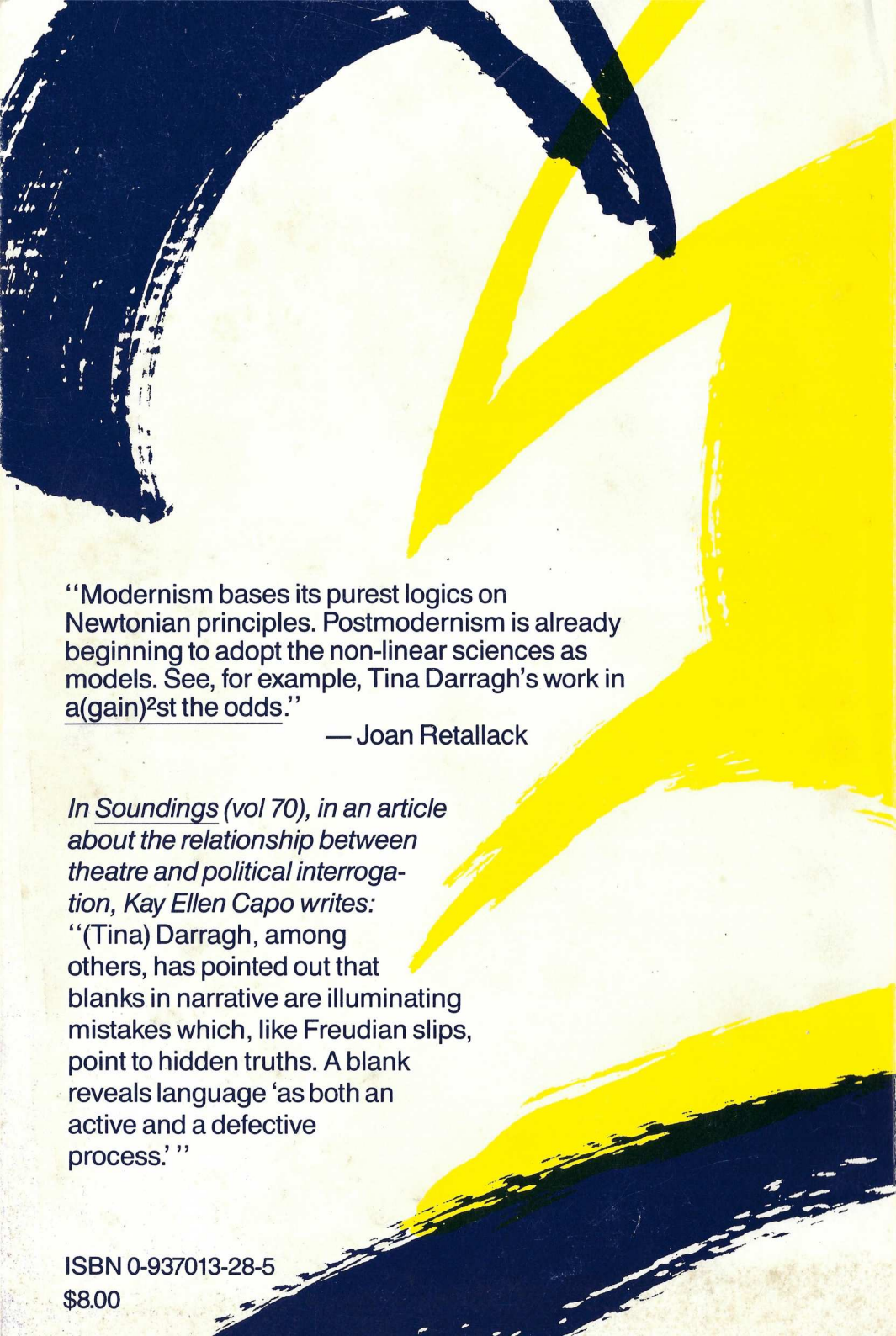
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POTES AND POETS PRESS PUBLICATIONS

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Dennis Barone, *The World / The Possibility*
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Hannah Weiner, *Nijole's House*

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“Modernism bases its purest logics on Newtonian principles. Postmodernism is already beginning to adopt the non-linear sciences as models. See, for example, Tina Darragh’s work in a(gain)²st the odds.”

— Joan Retallack

In Soundings (vol 70), in an article about the relationship between theatre and political interrogation, Kay Ellen Capo writes:

“(Tina) Darragh, among others, has pointed out that blanks in narrative are illuminating mistakes which, like Freudian slips, point to hidden truths. A blank reveals language ‘as both an active and a defective process.’ ”

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